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The Power of Reality.

A SERMON

PREACHED IN DURHAM CATHEDRAL

ON

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1882,

BEING THE SUNDAY AFTER THE DEATH OF THE

Most Reverend Archibald Campbell Tait, D.D.,

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY,

BY

WILLIAM CHARLES LAKE, D.D.,

DEAN OF DURHAM.

ANDREWS AND CO., DURHAM.



II. SAMUEL, III., 38.

“Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel.”

I believe that if we were asked what, in a moral and religious sense, is the highest of all characters, we should not be wrong in answering—one of thorough reality, one which is always desirous of looking at things as they truly are, not distorted by the side lights of passion, of fancy, or even of feeling, and of acting accordingly. Such, in the first place, I venture to say, is the character of the Divine Book, and even of the Divine Being, in whom God has revealed Himself to man. If we look at the Book, we find that one of its most marked features is that it is real, in being entirely true to human nature, or, to use a common expression, that it “finds” us everywhere; and, if we look to our Divine example, we find the phrase “very man,” in its fullest sense, applicable to Him; we find in Him an absolute simplicity, an absolute calmness and reality, a rejection of all high flights of feeling or of passion, which separate Him from almost all the great heroes of the world, whether in genius or in action. This, then, is the law of Scripture; and this, as I believe, is the highest law of life. Reality is, after all, that which draws all men to it. It is not necessarily *always* victorious, at least, not so immediately, either in the conduct of the world or the manifold conflicts of human life.

Often in the world you see some partial and unreal interest or object triumphing, it may be for an indefinite time, over that real good which, as we can't help thinking, men ought to discern ; often in individuals we see some unreal personage, by the help of talent or imposture, deluding others or himself, and winning a considerable, though a transitory, credit. Still, generally, though not, I fear, invariably, the *real*—whether *man* or *things*—prevails in the end. The man may often have a long struggle to do so. He may have to call into play all his faith, in order to follow his convictions, to be real and true to himself, and not to adopt the tricks and cant of unreality. But in the end even the world discerns the true man, and, whether it entirely agrees with him or not, it places him among its heroes. Nor does his work ever fail. “It is impossible to say,” are the words of one of whom I am about soon to speak, “how much good “may not be done by any system carried out in the “Spirit of true Prayer,” *i.e.*, of the highest reality. Much, indeed, in the work, even of the sincerest men—“wood, hay, stubble”—may have to be “burned ;” but the example of a pure, and real, and self-denying character, especially when God has called it to do a great work, can “never fail,” never be wholly lost.

Such are among the first thoughts which have filled my mind in thinking upon the death of one of the not very numerous Heads of the English Church who will live as remarkable figures in its

history. He was, above all, real and simple, and he was emphatically *a man*, with the best qualities of a good man—courage, sound judgment, and a strong but tempered will; and though this is far from being all that is to be said of him, yet these I believe to have been the simple but strong foundations on which a great character grew and ripened. If I may venture to say so, I have had large opportunities for understanding it, for I have known him with the closest intimacy ever since I came—forty-seven years since—as a boy from school to be one of his earliest pupils at Oxford, and I have ever *known* him as the same true, simple, single-hearted, and to me, perfectly open and generous friend. I should not be true to myself if I did not add, that in many points which we each believed to be of great importance to the Church, we almost from the first differed widely; but it was a part of the largeness of his character that, wherever he believed a man “to hold the Head, which is Christ,” no minor difference diminished his affection, and, as I have often heard him say, that he counted it among the chief blessings of his life that he had been brought into close relations with a large variety of sincere convictions, and had learned to appreciate goodness under so many forms, so it was among his very last utterances to me that, various and almost conflicting as the work of many of his friends had been, God, he believed, had directed it all to good.

Well then, I would say that the leading features in the character of the great man whom we have lost (and whom I believe that all Churchmen, with hardly an exception, now mourn with affection) were its reality and completeness, and its calm self-reliance, and that its strength and beauty were seen not in the brilliancy of single gifts,—for there was perhaps some lack of imaginative power,—but in the harmony with which all his talents and feelings worked together, each being ready when it was wanted, and none ever running into exaggeration or unreality. Now, no doubt something of this mental balance has often been seen in very different men, and particularly (if I may say so) in many English ecclesiastics, who have been selected for what is called their “moderation,” and in whom it has resulted in nothing higher than an amiable, decorous, and commonplace character. But what saved it from being this in the late Archbishop of Canterbury was a great self-reliance, a determination, marked through life, to do all that he did with all his might, and this combined with a strong and statesmanlike instinct for action, and with a natural but controlled fire and impetuosity, akin to genius. He had always a keen sense (which he expressed on many occasions) that the worst possible state for a church was that of standing still. He had no sort of sympathy for that kind of “soundness” with which no one could possibly disagree, and of which “all men spoke well.” Wherever he was, whether at Carlisle, or in

London, or Canterbury, he was never content unless he had on hand some improvement in the working of the Church unknown before. He was one of the first,—though it should be added that in a different way Bishop Wilberforce was equally so, being in this his forerunner,—to popularise the work of a Bishop, and to make men understand that there could be such a thing as “a Great Bishop.” With this view, though of great innate dignity, he was, especially at the beginning of his career, almost to excess indifferent to the old forms of episcopal etiquette; and to “the astonishment,” it has truly been said, “of all lovers of routine, he at one time made his presence felt in various out-of-the-way places, now preaching in omnibus-yards, now visiting the sick wards of some Metropolitan Hospital, now penning a summons to the faithful, both clergy and laity, to make a noble and vigorous united effort on behalf of the spiritual destitution of London.” And this earnest practical zeal endeared him from the first to the great body of working Englishmen, so that it may, perhaps, be said with truth, that no English Bishop has ever been so great a favourite with the English laity. It has, indeed, been often remarked that he was the greatest and most influential Archbishop our Church has seen since Laud; and this is true; though these two great men had so few elements in common that it is difficult to compare them—the one essentially doctrinal, leaving an impress of himself upon the English Church which it has

never lost, though ending for the moment in failure, the other holding common sense and reality to be the paramount virtues, almost as much in religion as in worldly matters. Still, I venture to think that, in the main, these two typical Archbishops may justly be described as the two greatest rulers of the English Church since the Reformation.

Permit me to tarry for a few moments longer on one or two of the features of what may be justly termed this great career ; for it fell upon a time which must surely be for ever memorable in the English Church, a time fruitful in vigorous thought and in Church activity of every kind, but a time also of great ecclesiastical difficulty, in that it brought so prominently forward the diverse elements of which the English Church, the Church of the freest and most active-minded nation in the world, is composed. It was, in a word, in many respects at least, a great time of transition. "The old order," in religious as well as in worldly things, "was changing, giving place to new, and God was fulfilling Himself in many ways, lest one good custom should corrupt mankind." And for such a time, I venture to think, in all, or in almost all respects, our late ruler was eminently adapted. In the first place, as regards the Church in its conflict with eternal foes, his reputation for strong judgment, his calmness, his firmness, his courtesy and conciliation, were invaluable in making the laity, alike of the middle and the upper classes, firm supporters of our Church. And it is certainly

due in no small degree (though not solely) to this, that the Church of England, in spite of its internal difficulties, seems to hold a far stronger position in the country now than it did ten years since. He was convinced, almost to excess, that upon the connection between the Church and the State depended much of the religious feeling of the country ; and, so powerful was his influence over the laity, that an attempt to weaken this could never in his time have been attended with any prospect of success. And then, as regarded the great movement within the Church itself which the last forty years have unquestionably seen. Here we must regard his primacy as a whole ; and I believe that two things may at once be said of it : first, that he was in no sense a party man ; and, secondly, that his efforts were always, and in his last years increasingly so, for peace and for a comprehensive charity. As to the first, no man had a more deep conviction, which he expressed in many of his last utterances, that goodness is of no party ; and that the Church of England is constituted on the principle of allowing free play to those deep religious convictions which, by the very law of our being, take such different directions in truly good men. That he made no mistakes in this respect I am far indeed from saying. Brought up, as Bishop Butler and others of our greatest bishops have been, in a different communion, he perhaps never completely realised the great thought (which his predecessor Dr. Arnold had grasped, in

however mistaken a form) of the part which the Christian Church has played in the history of Christ's religion. He used to say, in a tone of humour, that he would not unchurch all his relations and early friends. Nor, perhaps, did he sufficiently estimate the strong hold which the beauty of public worship is gradually obtaining over devout minds in the present generation; and this led to an act inconsistent, in my opinion, with his own largeness of sympathy for all zealous work within the Church of England, and with that toleration of wide differences of opinion by which alone, as I believe, that Church can stand. But though I have never ventured to speak as if I believed his Primacy to have been faultless, where, it may well be asked, is the statesman, lay or ecclesiastic, whose conduct all will admit to have been free from error? and I hold it to be a proof of the ever-growing and ever-learning character of his mind, not only that he perceived the act of which I speak to have been a failure, but that he desired almost from the first that its application should be as limited as possible. "Both the Church and the world," these were almost his last written words, "seem entering on totally new phases;" and I am persuaded that he knew both human nature and the Church of England too well, to believe it desirable or possible to extinguish any religious movement which has its strong foundation in the convictions and conduct of really religious men. Nor can I avoid recording that his last words to

myself, spoken with failing breath, were a reference to what he called "our troubles," and that he expressed his great thankfulness at the spirit in which his last effort to promote the peace of the Church had been received.

I am afraid that in saying even thus much I may be thought by some to have spoken prematurely of a work that cannot be judged at once, and on which we must await the verdict of history. I have but wished to describe very briefly some of those qualities which were found in our late Archbishop of Canterbury, and which were such as (I venture to think) distinctly placed him within the small circle of the great men of his time. He was indeed in many respects a born ruler of men, and wherever his lot had been cast,—whether in a wide or a narrow sphere, whether in the political or the religious world,—his sound judgment, his self-reliance, his dignity of bearing, and his great aims, must have given him a commanding position. Nor can I doubt that, by the confidence which these qualities inspired, he was, in spite of some errors of judgment, pre-eminently fitted among the Prelates of his day to rule the Church of England wisely, and to leave it more deeply rooted than he found it in the attachment of its members.

I turn, however, in conclusion, to a happier thought; for who can doubt that it was the personal character far more than the opinions of this great man which made him dearly loved

by those who knew him best? I have tried, though very inadequately, to show what he was to the world; but how can I dwell upon what he was to his friends—not only in the buoyancy of his youth and health, but in the last days of his failing strength? I have spoken already of his absolute truthfulness and simplicity, of his unfailing friendship; and I might have said more of a home broken indeed by great trials, but the domestic happiness of which he once himself described to me as “a heaven upon earth.” Only two qualities more I will trust myself to dwell upon—that which was a great source of his influence, his social charm; and that playful humour which was ever ready, now to enliven an argument, now to disarm or win an opponent, and which was truly in him, as in another great man, “the wit which loved to play, not wound.” Such gifts, when they are the unaffected expression of a kind heart, are indeed a great power for good, whether in men holding a great social or a great religious position; they sweeten life, they are what the heathen moralist called “the very adornment of ‘virtue,’” and they are a true and Christian expression of St. Paul’s direction to every one “to rejoice with them that do rejoice,” as well as “to weep with them that weep.” And now I have but little more to say. Three great men, all of whom, in spite of wide differences, heartily loved the English Church, have been called to their rest in the last eighteen months; and it was impossible for any

one who knew them well not to admire and love them all. Their differences were, I say, in some respects, very great, and many of us would feel them to be so. But, on Friday last, I think that many who gathered round the grave at Addington must have been struck by the fact that the Hymn—the beloved Hymn of the Archbishop's home—was “Lead, kindly light, lead thou me on,” the work of the great man who has for so long left us. Who could hear it and not feel that a stronger bond binds men of true goodness than can be broken by any differences of opinion, however real and important? It must be so. If there be a God who has made us and loves us, we shall surely one day learn in Him, not indeed that it was of no importance to contend here for what we each believe to be the Faith, but that even differences of Faith shall one day be swallowed up in the greater victory of Love.





